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Chapter 11

The End of the Corsican Question?

Ivan Serrano

Politics and Society in Modern Corsica

The island of Corsica is situated between France and Italy and has an estimated population of 281,000.[1] Located in a strategic part of the western Mediterranean Sea, the history of the island has been characterised by long periods of foreign rule. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Corsica was under the influence of Genoa, but France's presence increased until the island was fully integrated into the French state as an ordinary département.[2] One of the first decrees passed by the Constitutional Assembly in November 1789 defined Corsica as an integral part of France.[3] Despite the loss of its political status, the eighteenth century is considered to have been a kind of golden age in Corsican history, as this was the time when Pasqual Paoli led a period of *de facto* independence between 1755 and 1769, and when Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote the so-called Projet de Constitution pour la Corse in 1763. However, its status as an integral part of France from the beginning of the Republic would not prevent Corsica from being perceived as a department that was *pas comme les autres*.[4] With its own language, culture and a social organisation based on traditional clans, Corsica was viewed from the perspective of continental France as an anachronistic, backward, uncivilised society.[5] This particular position of Corsica in the geopolitical structure of the French Empire, halfway between the overseas colonies and the cultural minorities of continental France, produced a feeling of malaise.[6]

The fact that Corsica is an island is a clear component of its specificity and an important factor in almost any social, political and economic issue affecting the island. Culturally, the most significant aspect of Corsican identity is the fact that it has its own language, *Corsu*, which is still widely spoken despite the

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1   According to the latest estimates of the National Institute of Statistics (INSEE), 60 per cent of the population were born in Corsica, 20 per cent in the rest of the state, and 10 per cent are of non-French origin <http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg_id=6&ref_id=poptc001> accessed 20 November 2008.

2   Thompson 1971: 69.

3   Ibid.: 60.

4   Pomponi 1979: 359.

5   Ibid.: 352.

6   Ibid.: 353.

absence of institutional recognition. At the social level, the strong presence of traditional families and clans has created a social structure with its own practices and networks. A striking characteristic of Corsica since the 1970s has been the presence of violent movements linked to nationalist demands for recognition, which have had a considerable influence on the evolution of Corsican and French politics.

Modern Corsican nationalism can be traced back to the late 1950s and 1960s, following a period when the movement had lost its legitimacy to represent the island's interests. This situation was largely due to the ambiguous relationship of Corsican nationalism with fascism and the irredentist question of Corsica's historical links with Genoa, which were used by Mussolini's regime as a reason to integrate the island into Italy.[7] This ambivalent position dominated Corsican society and the period witnessed significant symbolic claims of 'Frenchness', ranging from the patriotic demonstration of 1938, known as the 'Oath of Bastia', to the enthusiastic reception given to General de Gaulle when Corsica became the first French territory in Europe to be liberated from Fascist-Nazi occupation during the Second World War.[8] It was not until the late 1950s that a new generation of activists renewed the political discourse of Corsican nationalism by denouncing the state's neglect of the difficult situation the island found itself in during the post-war years and the political clientelism exercised by traditional clans. This first stage of modern Corsican nationalism was followed by a growing concern for cultural issues, aimed primarily at the preservation and promotion of the Corsican language, the development of political movements and the emergence of violence. These constitute the main elements of contemporary Corsican politics.

Geography and Economy

Historically, Corsica has suffered from under-development in comparison with continental France. A difficult terrain and a weak demography have conditioned the island's possibilities. Agriculture and, more recently, tourism have been the two main areas of economic activity. As they are at the core of potential Corsican development, state and regional policies have focused on agriculture and tourism since the 1950s, but they have also been a source of conflict and social mobilisation. The centralised design of regional policy was perceived by a significant part of the society as a potential threat to Corsican identity. With regard to agricultural policy, the reform was part of the state's strategy to accommodate the French nationals from Algeria – known as the *pied-noirs* – who fled to continental France after the war of independence.[9] In Corsica, the arrival of the *pieds-noirs* (paradoxically, a

significant proportion of them were of Corsican origin) generated grievances as they enjoyed financial support that was not available to local people.[10] Regarding tourism and the environment, the development model was seen as a threat to the island's natural heritage and social structure and was often referred to as the danger of 'Balearisation' and 'Decorsification'.[11] Feelings of unfair treatment by the state resulted in several conflicts that reflected the historical sense of *malaise*. These ranged from the state's role with regard to the illegal toxic dumping carried out by the Italian company Montedison in Corsican waters to the so-called 'Aléria Incident', when a protest on a farm owned by a *pied-noir* turned into a violent confrontation with the French police which resulted in the death of two people and the detention of the prominent nationalist leader Edmond Simeoni. It could be said that mobilisation generated by these issues – the economy, tourism, agriculture, and the environment – has provided Corsican nationalism with a way to influence the political agenda beyond the limited support that the movement enjoys, especially in the pre-assembly years when it was difficult to gain access to the public sphere of institutional politics.[12]

Culture and Language

Language is a paradigmatic element that shapes cultural identities and is often a source of political claims. However, active demands for the protection and promotion of *Corsu* did not play a significant role in nationalist discourse until the late 1960s, when it was put on the agenda of emerging cultural and political movements such as *Scola Corsa* or the *Front Régionaliste Corse*.[13] The French Assembly passed a law in 1951 – the *Loi Deixonne* – which made it possible for regional languages to be taught in schools on a voluntary basis, but the Corsican language did not attain this status until 20 years later, in 1974.[14] However, the language's new status did not result in its achieving a significant presence in the educational system, the public administration, or the mass media. *Corsu* is taught on a non-compulsory basis in schools. Demands for *Corsification* – that is, the presence of the language in official documents and as a merit to join the civil service – have not been successful, and the language has only a symbolic presence in the public media.

Politics and Society

The historical presence of clans has always had a strong influence on island life and is a key element for understanding the evolution of Corsican politics.

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7 Ibid.: 408.
8 Ramsay 1983: 18.
9 In fact, Algeria was divided in ordinary departments since the nineteenth century, but only the population of French origin enjoyed full citizenship rights (Weil 2003).

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10 Ramsay 1983: 38.
11 Ibid.: 36.
12 Vanina 1995: 78.
13 Olivesi 1998: 177; Noer 1988: 32.
14 Ramsay 1983: 73.

Reactions to political clientelism or electoral fraud related to the control exercised by traditional clans were among the reasons for the emergence of nationalist movements, which have denounced how these local elites have participated in the state's policy to neglect and deny Corsican needs and identity.[15] This particular social structure has produced one of the most salient characteristics of Corsican politics: fragmentation (see Table 11.1 and Figure 11.1). Fostered by a political system with majoritarian constituencies and the importance of local administration, the Corsican political map is atomised around traditional families of *notables*, distributed among several electoral lists and parties. However, fragmentation is also one of the characteristics of Corsican nationalism which has, to a certain extent, reproduced the pattern of clan organisation.[16] Divisions among the nationalist movements are not only based on political differences;

Table 11.1   Corsican Nationalist Parties

Autonomist Parties
CEDIC : Comité d'étude pour la défense des intérêts de la Corse
UCA: Union Corse de l'Avenir
FRC: Front Régionaliste Corse
ARC: Action Régionaliste Corse
ARC*: Azzione per a rinascita Corsa
PPC: Partitu Popularu Corsu
UPC: Unione di Populu Corsu
PNC: Partitu di a Nazione Corsa
A Chjama Naziunale

Armed/clandestine groups (in italics)
FPLC: *Fronte Paisanu Corsu di Liberazione*
FLNC: *Fronte di Liberazione Nazionale di a Corsica*

Secessionist Parties
MCA: Movimentu Corsu pà l'Autodeterminazione
MPA: Movimentu pà l'autodeterminazione
ANC: Accolta Naziunale Corsa
CN: A Cuncolta Naziunalista (1990)
Corsica Nazione (1996)
Unione Naziunale (2007)

Coalitions
Unità Naziunalista
Cuncolta Naziunalista
Corsica Nazione
Unione Nazionale
Femu a Corsica
Corsica Libera

15   Bernabeu-Casanova 1997: 52; Ramsay 1983: 31.
16   For an account of clan loyalties and nationalist movements, see Molas 2000.
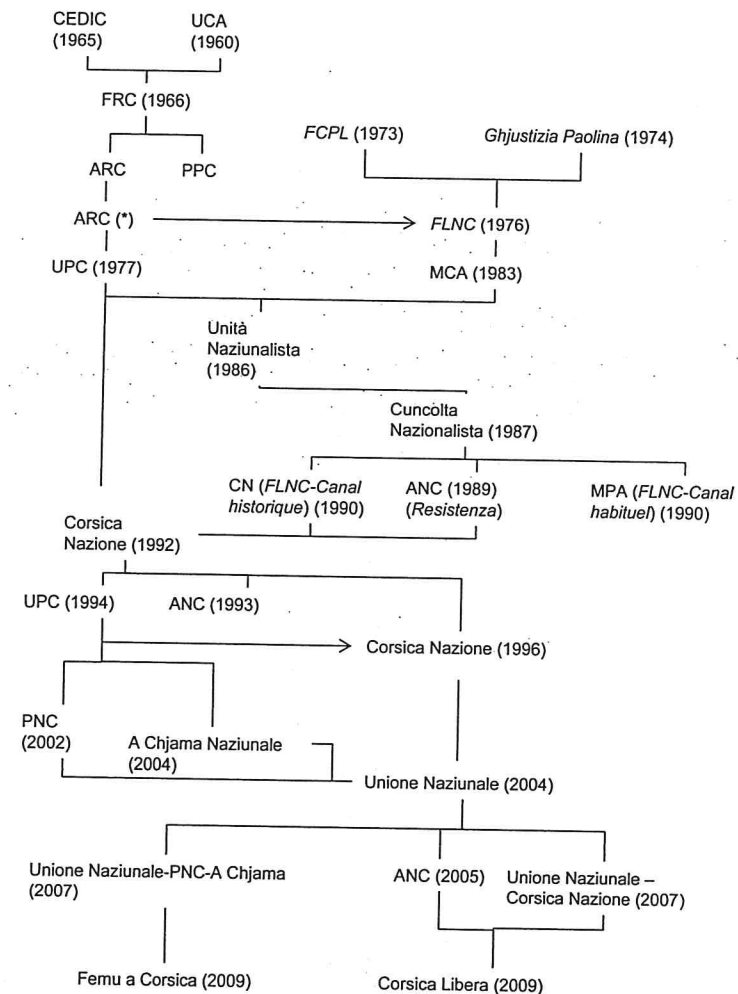
Figure 11.1   Evolution of Main Corsican Nationalist Parties, Coalitions and Armed Groups

leadership struggles also account, to a great extent, for the failure to consolidate a unified political movement. Ideologically, there are two main dividing lines. The first is related to the pro-autonomy–secessionist dichotomy, which can be traced back to the influence of regionalist and anti-colonialist ideologies that emerged in the 1960s. The second involves the justification of violence as a political tool in response to the state's allegedly colonial attitude towards Corsica.

This anti-colonial rhetoric was used by the *Front National de Libération Corse* (FNLC) when it emerged in 1976. The group demanded 'la reconnaissance des droits nationaux du peuple corse [et] la destruction de tous les instruments du colonialisme français'. Attitudes to violence became a source of division among pro-autonomy and secessionist groups and has contributed to their failure to carry out unified political action.[17]

The Institutional Evolution of Corsica

The institutional status of Corsica in contemporary France is linked to regionalisation policies established following the Second World War. The initial period is characterised by a process of functional regionalisation, with a top-down, incremental approach. When François Mitterrand became president of the Republic, a new period of institutionalisation began with the passing of the first statute of autonomy in 1982. A second statute was passed in 1991, and by the end of the decade, a new initiative was launched by Lionel Jospin aimed at overcoming the incremental approach to regional policy. However, the Matignon process was never fully implemented. First, at the legal level the *Conséil Constitutionnel* overruled important aspects of the law, and secondly, the conservative victory in the parliamentary and presidential elections of 2002 heralded a new approach to decentralisation policies.

The Regionalisation Process

The beginning of regional policy   The period of functional regionalisation of the 1950s is characterised by the incremental process of the successive creation of regional divisions and sectorial agencies. In 1956, the state was divided into 22 *Régions de Programme* designed to develop regional policies for territorial planning (*aménagement du territoire*). In the case of Corsica, two sectorial agencies were created in key economic areas, SOMIVAC for agriculture, and SETCO for tourism.[18] A new regional structure was introduced in 1960, the *Areas d'Action Régional*. This new division was based on the same logic as territorial planning and focused on infrastructures and public services at the regional level. During this stage, which was characterised by a functional, top-down division of the state for planning purposes, Corsica was attached to the region of Provence-Côte d'Azur. The need to coordinate the growing complexity of regional policy led to the creation of new structures at national and regional level.[19] At national level, from 1963 the DATAR (*Délégation à l'Aménagement du Territoire et à l'Action Régionale*) was responsible for supervising the regional implementation of

17   Bernabeu-Casanova 1997: 117.
18   Ramsay 1983: 36.
19   Ashford 1982: 109.

territorial planning. At regional level, the CODERs (*Commissions de Dévelopment Economique et Régionale*) were created in 1964 as consultative bodies to give a voice to locally elected chambers of commerce and unions. Finally, in 1964, a new post, the *préfet regional*, was created to be the state's representative in the regions and to coordinate public policies at this level in the context of a new structure, the *Missions Regionales*.[20]

It should be noted that the regions emerged as functional units for territorial planning, but no particular legal status or democratic tie was established to ensure that they were fully fledged political spaces. The institutional recognition of the regions would be part of de Gaulle's constitutional reform project to revitalise the French political system by the end of the 1960s, in the aftermath of May 1968. Proposals included the recognition of the regions as *collectivités territoriales* based on Article 72 of the Constitution, the creation of regional assemblies with executive powers and some degree of financial autonomy which included locally elected representatives and members of the civil society (in line with the CODER logic), and the reinforcement of the regional prefect as the executive officer of the assemblies.[21] The referendum was held in 1969 and received wide support in Corsica, with 55 per cent of votes in favour. However, it was rejected at the national level and de Gaulle would eventually resign the presidency, as he had promised during the campaign.[22] As a result, the next step of the regionalisation process was paralysed and major reforms for Corsica and the recognition of regions within continental France were put on hold. In 1970, during the presidency of Georges Pompidou (1969–74), an *Area d'Action Regional* and a CODER for Corsica were created. In 1976, with Valéry Giscard d'Estaing as president (1974–81), the island was divided into two departments. This had the effect of increasing the number of representatives to the *Assemblée National* to four deputies and two senators.[23] Pompidou and Giscard d'Estaing were not in favour of decentralisation and the recognition of the regional plurality of the state, but the problems that were at the origin of de Gaulle's reform remained unsolved, while a number of new problems were emerging.[24] The recognition of the regions as political actors with some kind of elected assemblies was still on the political agenda but, more importantly, the emergence of political violence in Corsica added an additional element of complexity that needed to be addressed in some way.

The institutionalisation of the regions: The Statutes of 1982 and 1991   The second period of regional policies began when François Mitterrand became president of

20   Douence 1995: 11.
21   Décret no. 69-296 du 2 avril 1969, décidant de soumettre un projet de loi au référendum <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jopdf/common/jo_pdf.jsp?numJO=0&dateJO= 19690403&numTexte=&pageDebut=03315&pageFin=> accessed 25 October 2009.
22   Olivesi 1998: 180.
23   Ramsay 1983: 66.
24   Bernabeu-Casanova 1997: 126.

the Republic in 1981. In 1982, the National Assembly passed the first Statute of Corsica, the so-called 'Defferre Statute', named after Gaston Defferre, mayor of Marseille and minister of the interior and decentralisation in the government of Pierre Mauroy. In 1991, a second statute was passed with Pierre Joxe as minister of the interior in the government of Michel Rocard. The main elements of the statutes of 1982 and 1991 can be divided into four different areas: recognition, political representation, powers and state control.

The 1982 statute[25] recognised Corsica as a region with a *statute particulier*, and the island was referred to in the text as a *collectivité territorial*. This was an option that had been used in 1976 when the island of Mayotte (in the Comoros Islands) first rejected independence and later the status of *Territoire d'Outre-mer* (TOM). However, these references were mainly rhetorical as they did not provide Corsica with the same status of departments and municipalities as other territories which enjoyed constitutional recognition as *collectivités territoriales*. With regard to political representation, the main element was the creation of a regional assembly of 61 members, elected by a two-round proportional system with the two departments of the island as constituencies (Bais and Haute Corse). The chamber elected a president and six vice-presidents, and received executive and consultative powers, although no financial autonomy or legislative capacity was granted.[26] The assembly could participate in policy making in areas such as territorial planning, education, culture and transportation, in coordination with the state and other departments and municipalities.[27] Consultation powers were a limited version of the arrangements established for the *Territoires d'Outre-mer*: bi-directional consultation through which the regional assembly could send proposals to amend national legislation affecting Corsica and the central government could ask the regional assembly to deliberate on issues relating to the island. The difference in the case of Corsica was that these arrangements had non-binding effects: the central government could consult the assembly at its discretion, but was under no obligation to take into consideration proposals to amend national legislation.[28] The state controlled regional activity through the *préfet*. This figure was an active actor in regional policy making and was endowed with *ex-ante* and *ex-post* powers and the capacity to propose the dissolution of the regional assembly to the central government. The next step in the decentralisation process was the extension of the Corsican model to the continental regions, in order to equip them with their own regional assemblies and similar powers.[29]

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25   Loi no. 82-214 du 2 mars 1982 Portant statute particulier de la region Corse <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jopdf/common/jo_pdf.jsp?numJO=0&dateJO=19820303& numTexte=&pageDebut=00748&pageFin=> accessed 25 November 2009.

26   Hitjens, Loughlin and Olivesi 1995: 121.

27   Douence 1995: 11.

28   Hitjens, Loughlin and Olivesi 1995: 115.

29   Ramsay 1983: 206.

The regions were expected to play a significant role by becoming a point of reference for departments and municipalities and would have the capacity to influence and implement the state's territorial policies. However, the regions were limited both from above and below. At the state level, the government agencies continued to manage the configuration of territorial policies.[30] From below, departments and *communes* retained the financial capacity to implement their own policies without the intervention of the region. Furthermore, the subregional structures remained the political point of reference at the local level. The departments were established as the electoral constituencies for regional elections, but their own political dynamic weakened the consolidation of the regions as political arenas. Consequently, they suffered from a lack of legitimacy and effectiveness. As a result, recognition of Corsican specificity was diluted into a homogeneous regional model, and this quickly created a case for a new statute that would endow Corsica with a special status.[31]

The new Statute of 1991[32] was designed to improve Corsica's status in the above mentioned areas. Regarding political representation, the most significant change was the reduction of the regional assembly to 51 members. This was done in order to increase the political stability of the chamber. The new official nomenclature for the regional structure would be *Collectivité Territorial de la Corse*, situating the legal status of the island at the same level as that of departments and municipalities. Further executive powers relating to economic development, territorial planning and culture were also transferred.[33] The state reduced the role of the *préfet* by transferring some of this official's executive powers to the regions and departments and limiting the post's *ex-ante* controls. But the most important element to address, as the Corsican Assembly declared in 1988, was the symbolic recognition of the *peuple corse*.[34] This proposal was controversial, as it challenged the idea of a single *peuple français*. Consequently, the final version of the statute amended the term by stating that the Corsican people were part of the French people ('le peuple corse, composant du peuple français'). The bill was passed in the National Assembly with a narrow majority, but the *Conséil Constitutionnel* finally overruled the expression, arguing that the expression 'peuple' could be applied only to the French people and that it was indivisible.[35] Furthermore, the

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30   Douence 1995: 15.

31   Ibid.: 17.

32   Loi no. 91-428 du 13 mai 1991 portant statut de la collectivité territoriale de Corse <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000536085&date Texte=> accessed 25 November 2009.

33   Verseaux 1999: 3–11.

34   Délibération no. 88/59 AC de l'Assemblée de Corse, 1988: 'L'Assemblée de Corse affirme l'existence d'une communauté historique et culturelle vivante regroupant les corses d'origine et les corses d'adoption : le peuple corse' <http://www.corse.fr/file/68568> accessed 25 November 2009.

35   Décision no. 91-290 DC du 09 mai 1991 <http://www.conseil-constitutionnel. fr/conseil-constitutionnel/francais/les-decisions/acces-par-date/decisions-depuis-

Conséil ruled that the idea of a Corsican people, even if they were considered to be part of the French nation, could not be used as an argument to justify specific economic and social rights. In this way, it rejected the possibility of the symbolic recognition of Corsican identity[36]. The *Conséil Constitutionnel* accepted the teaching of the Corsican language in schools, although it emphasised the non-mandatory character of the measure. It is also worth mentioning that in 1992 the Constitution was reformed to meet the requirements of the Treaty of Maastricht, and Article 2 was amended to stipulate French as the language of the Republic.[37] However, no reference to the existence of regional languages was included despite the fact that the Council of Europe also passed the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages the same year.[38]

The Matignon process and the constitutional reforms   Lionel Jospin was appointed prime minister following the victory of the Socialist Party in the parliamentary election of 1997 and adopted a new approach to the Corsican question. The initiative, known as the 'Matignon process', consisted of a negotiated plan which included a strong component of bilateralism between the central government and Corsican representatives.[39] These negotiations resulted in a series of six reports on different aspects of decentralisation which were published on 20 July 2008 and passed by the Corsican Assembly on 28 July by a majority of 44 of the 51 deputies.[40] Two of the assembly's basic demands were included in the proposals. The first was the suppression of the Corsican departments and the second was the granting of the power to amend central government decisions that affected the island. The proposals included the possibility for the Corsican assembly to adapt state decrees and, more importantly, a measure that represented an innovation within the French institutional system: under the term expérimentation, the Corsican Assembly would receive legislative powers for a limited period of time. This could be interpreted as an attempt to introduce a kind of 'legislative asymmetry'.[41] The temporary basis of this provision was designed to prevent the opposition of the Conséil Constitutionnel, as the measure would require an amendment of the Constitution. In the end, the Assemblée National

1959/1991/91-290-dc/decision-n-91-290-dc-du-09-mai-1991.8758.html> accessed 25 November 2009.

36   Loughlin 2000: 199.

37   Loi no. 92-554 du 25 juin 1992 constitutionnelle ajoutant à la Constitution un titre 'Des Communautés européennes et de l'Union européenne' <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000723466&dateTexte=> accessed 25 November 2009.

38   Council of Europe 1992, *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* <http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/en/Treaties/Html/148.htm> accessed 25 November 2009.

39   Albertini and Torre 2002: 35.

40   Pellegrenetti and Rovere 2004: 638.

41   Cole 2006: 45.

retained the capacity to exercise a posteriori censure.[42] In order to increase the viability of the arrangements and in accordance with the gradual nature of the process, a number of controversial issues such as the recognition of a 'Corsican people' in a new statute were excluded from the first phase of negotiations. This was also the case for the recognition of the Corsican language; the arrangements envisioned the non-compulsory teaching of the language in schools.[43]

However, the Matignon proposals were never fully implemented. On the one hand, the *Conséil Constitutionnel* overruled the provisions of the *expérimentation législative* and emphasised the non-compulsory nature of the teaching of the Corsican language in schools, limiting the possibilities of a significant improvement in Corsican autonomy.[44] On the other hand, the failure of the Socialist Party in the legislative elections and above all Lionel Jospin's defeat in the presidential elections of 2002 resulted in a change in the direction of decentralisation, which would henceforth be led by the new Conservative government. The new government wished to temporarily suspend decentralisation policies, but the momentum created by Matignon finally resulted in the reform of the Statute of 1991 and a constitutional amendment that addressed some of its proposals in a wider programme of institutional reforms led by Nicolas Sarkozy.[45] The regions were recognised in Article 72 as *collectivités territorials*, in a list of *collectivités* that also mentioned the existence of *collectivités à statut particulier*. In this way, a potential element of asymmetry could be developed which included the possibility of establishing some repeal powers concerning national legislation that affected the powers of the *collectivités territoriales*, though on an experimental, temporary basis defined by the National Assembly. Article 72.1 was also reformed to establish the possibility of holding regional referendums to pass or reform regional statutes. This in itself represented a symbolic element of recognition of the regions as substate realities.[46] This last provision was applied in the case of Corsica; a non-binding referendum was scheduled for July 2003 to consult the Corsican electorate regarding a reform that in essence included the replacement of the two departments of the island by a new structure – territorial councils – that would create an administrative division below the regional structure.[47] No other aspect of the constitutional reform, such as the possibility of legislative powers in the form of *expérimentation*, was included. The Corsican electorate rejected the

42   Daftary 2008: 295.

43   Ibid.

44   Conseil Constitutionnel, Décision no. 2001-454 DC du 17 janvier 2002 <http://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/conseil-constitutionnel/root/bank/download/cc-2001454dc.pdf> accessed 25 October 2009.

45   Loughlin 2008: 567.

46   Loi constitutionnelle no. 2003-276 du 28 mars 2003 relative à l'organisation décentralisée de la République <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000601882&dateTexte=> accessed 25 October 2009.

47   Daftary 2008: 302.

proposal. Consequently, the current institutional status of Corsica still basically derives from the amendment of the Statute of 1991, which was introduced in 2002. The Corsican Assembly had the power to amend national decrees that affected regional competences, but no steps leading towards the capacity to amend national legislation were introduced.[48] Finally, the most recent constitutional reform in 2008 included the mention of the decentralised character of the Republic in Article 1 and the recognition of regional languages as part of French heritage in Article 75.1, but it is still unclear to what extent this will result in significant changes for their institutional protection.[49]

A Fragmented Assembly (1982–2009)

The creation of the regional assembly in 1982 gave rise to an autonomous political space in Corsica. The first regional elections held that year were characterised by the principal characteristic of the Corsican party system: fragmentation. Fourteen groups obtained representation in the assembly. The conservative groups obtained 29 seats and 45 per cent of the votes, the largest group was the RPR-UDF with 19 seats. The left won 23 seats and 35.5 per cent of the votes, 11 seats went to the MRG and seven to the PCF. The Socialist Party obtained two seats. The nationalist and pro-autonomy movements obtained 15 per cent of the votes and nine seats. This fragmentation resulted in an unstable parliament and two years later, new elections were held. The nationalists lost half their support and six seats, and only the UPC obtained representatives. However, a new nationalist group, the MCA, which was linked to the FLNC, obtained three seats in the assembly. The left won 25 seats and 40 per cent of the votes, three more than the conservatives. The *Front National* of Jean-Marie Le Pen participated for the first time in Corsican elections winning six seats and 9 per cent of the votes; it gave its support to the RPR's candidate J.P. Rocca-Serra, thus allowing the Conservatives to stay in office.[50] The development of the Corsican statute soon revealed the limits of the reform. The French government vetoed the Corsican Assembly's initiatives and Corsican nationalists denounced the statute as a *chiffon de papier*.[51] Following the expectations generated by the first statute, the situation became more complicated when the FLNC resumed its violent attacks.

Within this institutional context, 1988 marked the beginning of the process of drawing up a new statute. The FLNC declared a cease-fire when the French Prime Minister Michel Rocard promised to 'traiter de façon particulière le cas

particulier de la Corse', provided violent actions ceased. In that year, the Corsican Assembly passed a resolution claiming 'l'existence d'une commonauté historique et culturelle vivante, regroupant les Corses d'origin et d'ádoption: le peuple corse'.[52] Meanwhile, the different factions of nationalist and pro-autonomy movements agreed to present unified lists in the regional elections. The coalition was first tested in the local elections and recorded good results.[53] However, a few months later, one of the coalition members, the pro-autonomy UPC, joined the Corsican committee – with the RPR, UDF and PS – in negotiations with Minister of the Interior Pierre Joxe.[54] As a result of the UPC's decision to join the committee, the nationalist coalition suffered a crisis and finally split. The FLNC underwent a crisis too. The FLNC-*canal historique* and A Cuncolta adopted a more pragmatic position towards the process, while the FLNC-*canal habituel* and the *Movimentu per l'Autodeterminazione* were sceptical about the possible results of the reform.[55]

The first elections to be held under the new statute took place in 1992. The new scenario once again brought together the nationalist and pro-autonomy Corsican movements under the *Corsica Nazione* coalition. The coalition's manifesto claimed 'le droit du peuple corse à choisir démocratiquement son destin en vue de la réappropiation de sa souveraineté et de la maîtrise de son développement.' This claim for self-determination was closely linked to culture and language and stated that cultural recognition had to involve 'cultural decolonisation, avec notamment l'officialisation et l'enseignement obligatoire de la langue corse de la maternelle à l'université et à la mise en place de la coofficialité'.[56] The strategy turned out to be successful: the coalition won nine seats and received 17 per cent of the votes. The radical MPA also obtained four seats and 8 per cent of the votes. As a result, the nationalist movements were represented in the assembly with 13 seats and 25 per cent of the votes. The RPR won 16 seats and 24 per cent of the votes, the UDF eight seats and 16 per cent, and the left-wing MRG five seats and 10 per cent of the votes. The nationalist groups became an important force and were regarded with concern by the traditional parties. In this context, J.P. Rocca-Serra was elected president of the Assembly thanks to support from both right-wing and left-wing parties, such as the RPR and the MRG. Corsican nationalism had shown that a unified political strategy could have positive results, but one year after the election new conflicts arose within *Corsica Nazione*.[57]

The situation underwent a dramatic change in 1998 when the *préfet* Claude Erignac was assassinated by a dissident group of the FLNC. This crime shocked

48   Ibid.: 303.

49   *Loi constitutionnelle no. 2008-724 du 23 juillet 2008 de modernisation des institutions de la Ve République* <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do;jsessionid =FBFA8C165B8225617172C4C3DC2A4AEA.tpdjo13v_1?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000019 237256&dateTexte=20080724> accessed 25 October 2009.

50   Bernabeu-Casanova 1997: 163.

51   Ibid.: 166.

52   *Délibération No. 90/47 AC de l'Assemblée de Corse, 1988* <www.corse.fr/ file/68636/> accessed 25 November 2009.

53   Bernábeu-Casanova 1997: 184.

54   Vanina 1995: 33.

55   Ibid.: 36.

56   Ibid.: 78.

57   Ibid.: 60.

Corsican society, but it also ushered in the beginning of a new era for the Corsican question. The nationalist groups were seriously affected in the 1998 elections, when only *Corsica Nazione* obtained representation while at the same time losing half of its electoral support. However, a few months later, another event shook Corsican society. The new prefect, Pasqual Bonnet, was accused of illegal actions against Corsican nationalists. From a political standpoint, these events showed that both French and Corsican nationalism needed to practise political fair play.[58] Corsican society rejected violence as a means of achieving nationalist demands, but the state's response to Corsica's political claims also had to follow a democratic path. Amid denunciations of electoral fraud, new elections were held in 1999 and *Corsica Nazione* received a level of support similar to that of the early 1990s, with eight seats and 17 per cent of the votes. The Matignon process generated new expectations of a special status that would recognise the island's specificity. The participation of nationalist representatives from *Corsica Nazione* introduced a new scenario where a viable and stable agreement seemed likely, though it was controversial because the pro-autonomy parties were not represented.[59] Even after the failure of Matignon, the nationalists ran together in the 2004 elections and obtained 17.34 per cent of the vote and eight representatives, practically the same results as 1998. But in the following years, new divisions arose, above all with regard to the classical controversy regarding violence, and the coalition disintegrated. It could be argued that, in the aftermath of Matignon, the failed referendum and the most recent constitutional reforms, the Corsican question was to a certain extent on hold. In 2010, two different lists participated in the regional elections. Despite divisions, nationalist movements obtained a historical success with 26 per cent of the vote and 11 seats for the autonomist *Femu a Corsica* (becoming the second group in the assembly) and 10 per cent of the vote and four seats for the more radical *Corsica Libera*. Nationalist movements were close to becoming for the first time the largest group in the regional chamber, but finally a majority of left groups formed a coalition excluding the possibility for nationalists to participate in the regional government.

Corsica: Between Recognition and Symmetrisation

Resymmetrisation consists of at least three different phases: symmetry, asymmetry and resymmetrisation. In the French–Corsican case, these three phases can be described as follows: (a) the initial stage, characterised by territorial symmetry in the distribution of power and regional policy determined by the central state through a generalised, top-down, functional approach; (b) the asymmetric phase, in which some regions are endowed with a singular status, either by the specificity of the process itself, or by the establishment of a certain degree of autonomous

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58   Daftary 2000: 30; Vallet 2004: 52.
59   Dominici 2005: 7.

power, and (c) a resymmetrisation phase, in which devolution is extended to all the regions and the state reinforces its steering capacity with regard to the scope and the speed of decentralisation.

Territorial distribution of power in France has historically been divided between central and local levels of government. Regionalisation policies in the 1950s gave rise to a number of regional agencies and boards with a number of planning, executive and consultative powers, under the supervision of the state. Since 1982, functional decentralisation has taken a new step towards the institutionalisation and political recognition of the regions with the setting-up of elected regional assemblies endowed with a number of executive powers. The asymmetric process by which Corsica received its first statute in 1982 was quickly followed by the extension of this model to the continental regions. From the central government's perspective, the reforms implemented in Corsica were a pilot programme for the regionalisation of the state. It could be argued that asymmetry is more related to the process than to the contents of the reform, as the creation of the regional assemblies is the most visible effect of the regions as political arenas. The reform of the statute in 1991 was designed to add symbolic recognition to the administrative reality of Corsica with the reference to the existence of a 'Corsican people'. However, the opposition of the *Conséil Constitutionnel* made it clear that any step towards political and institutional recognition of the regions must be accompanied by constitutional reform. In 1998, the Matignon process introduced an element of bilateralism between the central government and the Corsican representatives, and the possibility of developing some experimental arrangements that would eventually result in a reform of the Constitution. After Matignon, the new conservative governments addressed the Corsican question within the framework of a general policy of decentralisation for all the regions, and it included some of the elements that had previously been in the debate, such as the constitutional recognition of the regions, or the possibility of transferring legislative powers on a limited and temporary basis. The constitutional reform of 2003 recognised a wide range of substate levels of administration as 'collectivités territoriales de la République', with a hierarchical distinction between overseas territories and departments, and a formal mention of the *collectivités a statute particulier*, where some legislative experimentation can be transferred in accordance with terms defined by the state. Finally, the most recent constitutional reform in 2008 included a reference to the decentralised character of the state and the consideration of regional languages as a national heritage.

Regional policy is based on the state's control of the scope and speed of the reforms, and functional and administrative matters prevail over political and symbolic recognition. Under the current constitutional model, Corsica enjoys formal status as laid down in Article 72.1, as a *collectivité territoriale* with a particular statute. This has not resulted in significant changes to the region's powers and it occupies a position halfway between the continental regions and the overseas territories, which reflects the perception by Corsican nationalists that Corsica is neither a metropolitan nor a colonial territory. It could be argued that the

most recent constitutional reforms of 2003 and 2008 both widen and limit the scope of decentralisation. On the one hand, they widen the framework within which new reforms can be implemented, giving the regions constitutional recognition and defining the decentralised character of the state. However, this recognition has no formally asymmetric component in the same way that regions and *collectivités à statut particulier* are regarded as *collectivités territoriales* together with the rest of the administrative divisions. The *collectivités d'outre-mer* are the only ones that enjoy a significant asymmetric status. In fact, the possibility of derogating legislative decrees affecting the powers of the *collectivités* is not reserved in the constitutional reform to any particular one of them, as it is regulated by the National Assembly and the central government. Thus, on the other hand, it could be argued that constitutional reform also sets the limits of decentralisation. The state has the capacity to develop a homogeneous regional model since it is able to control – by recognising the *préfet regional* as the representative of national interest in the regions – or even reverse the decentralisation process.

An Emerging Consensus? Actors and Reasonings

A typical approach to analysing the different positions with regard to the regional question is to divide them between the state perspective and the substate territory that is demanding some degree of self-government. However, significant differences can be found within this broad distinction when they are analysed in more detail. In the case of the republican perspective, the position regarding the regional question can be analysed in terms of the opposition between those who regard decentralisation policies as a tool to reinforce the republican project and those who perceive them as a potential threat to national sovereignty and even to territorial integrity. In the pro-autonomy nationalist camp there are common positions regarding recognition, but significant differences exist with regard to the reasons that are used to justify these claims. A distinction can be made between a pro-autonomy position where Corsican identity is not conceived separately but rather as part of French identity, while a nationalist approach, though also seeking recognition for the distinct character of Corsica through autonomy rather than independence, is based on 'national' elements that justify its right to self-determination and a particular status within the Republic.

Contemporary debates on the concept of the Republic from the state perspective can be interpreted as the modern version of the classical distinction between Girondinism and Jacobinism. In the contemporary terms of this debate, *pluralists* defend the recognition of the state's territorial diversity, while *sovereigntists* perceive a threat to the founding elements of the Republic by challenges such as regionalisation, European integration, or migrations.[60] An important characteristic of this opposition is that it does not follow left–right or party lines. In the Matignon

60   Loughlin 2006: 11.

process, the most significant opposition arose within the Socialist Party. On the conservative side, the traditional position regarding regionalisation can be described as cautious, if not reluctant, and after the Matignon process, the new conservative government attempted to 'pause' regionalisation. However, some of the Matignon proposals were developed by the new government, which argued that there was a need to modernise the administration and the political system of the Republic on the basis that regional reforms were to be implemented homogeneously for all the regions and possible asymmetry in the case of Corsica would remain in the process but not in the final arrangements. The particular reforms would still be conceived as a pilot programme that would subsequently be extended to the rest of the regions. Nevertheless, it could be argued that the reforms carried out by the conservative governments since 2002 follow the main lines of the regionalisation process that began in 1982, and that some of the Matignon proposals have been partially implemented, such as the possibility of legislative powers, or the constitutional recognition of the regions.

Mitterrand's election to the presidency of the Republic in 1981 played a decisive role in defining contemporary debates on decentralisation and the model upon which the latter would be based. He addressed the regional question in the presidential campaign, expressing particular concern for the situation of the former colonies and also of Corsica. The Socialist Party had been building a more favourable position towards regionalisation since the mid-1960s, when Michel Rocard presented the *Décoloniser la province* report in 1966. Mitterrand did not support regionalisation, but embraced the party's position for tactical reasons. In his view, if the territorial reform of the state remained unaddressed, nationalist demands would become more and more difficult to manage: 'À 10 per cent on peut encore empêcher les choses, à 15 per cent c'est très difficile, à 20 per cent vous n'arretêz plus rien'.[61] In an interview for the Corsican magazine *Kyrn*, in 1977, Mitterrand acknowledged that the Corsicans had a 'droit à la différence'.[62]

In his political manifesto, *110 propositions pour la France*,[63] Mitterrand put forward a series of proposals for the regionalisation of France that would define the political agenda for the next 20 years. The 54th proposal of the manifesto stated that 'the decentralisation of the state will be a priority', and it supported the democratic election of regional councils, which would eventually provide Corsica with a 'particular statute'. Mitterrand's proposals involved a significant change in the Jacobin tradition as he mentioned the promotion of and respect for regional identities and minority cultures (the 56th proposal). A further aspect included in the manifesto was the idea of asymmetry for the overseas territories, showing that even a centralised state like France could generate arrangements to accommodate territorial diversity. The 58th proposal dealt with the need to adapt the French legal

61   Quoted in Albertini and Torre 2002: 7.
62   Pellegrinetti and Rovere 2004: 537.
63   '110 propositions pour la France' <http://www.lours.org/default.asp?pid=307> accessed 28 November 2009.

system in order to respond to the special situation in the former colonies due to their geographical situation, by adapting national laws to particular economic and cultural needs and in this way acknowledging their particular identities. For the Jacobin conception, the possibility of bringing these arrangements to continental France could be perceived as a challenge for the unity of the Republic, but for Corsican nationalists, they would soon be regarded as a potential horizon for accommodation within the state.

Once in office the Socialist government transformed the plans for Corsica into a regionalisation project for the whole state, thus limiting its scope.[64] The Republic had, in Mitterrand's words, 'besoin d'un pouvoir décentralisé pour ne pas se défaire',[65] but practical reasons such as the need to adapt the territorial structure of the state to the requirements of the EU's regional policy were also an important factor for understanding the institutionalisation of the regions.[66] This pragmatic approach emphasised the efficiency and functional goals of the reform over the recognition of regional identities. Once the regions were implemented at the formal level, issues relating to recognition of the internal diversity of the state were not fully addressed. This was the case, for instance, of cultural policy. Minister of Culture Jack Lang commissioned a study from the National Centre of Scientific Research (CNRS) regarding the situation of regional cultures in France. The final report[67] proposed a change in the state's historical policy towards regional cultures, the creation of a regional television channel and bilingual publication of official documents wherever a regional language existed. These proposals were controversial and the conservative victory in the first elections to all the regional assemblies in 1986 prevented their implementation.[68] The statute was expected at least to result in the administrative and cultural recognition of Corsica, but it was finally implemented under the traditional unitary conception of the state.[69]

The Matignon process constitutes a second phase of debates on regional policy and represents a significant innovation in French politics. First, the absence of violence was a *sine qua non* condition but this did not limit the scope of the possible agreements, thus reinforcing the political perspective of the process.[70] Secondly, it was designed as a bilateral conversation between Corsican and French representatives.[71] Third, the process aimed to bring opposing conceptions into the public arena, from radical Jacobinism to Corsican secessionism. Fourth, the process was designed to increase the possibility of an agreement between such diverse positions by addressing reforms gradually, following the so-called

64   Vanina 1995: 12.
65   Noer 1988: 8; Ramsay 1983: 203.
66   Douence 1995: 13.
67   Giordan 1982.
68   Noer 1988: 36.
69   Ramsay 1983: 206.
70   Albertini and Torre 2002: 35.
71   A meeting in the Åland Islands in 1998 represented an important step forward for the political debate between Corsican and French nationalism.

méthode caledonienne. Jospin's approach to the Corsican question was not merely tactical. In an interview he gave in 1996, he considered that the Joxe Statute was obsolete and the time had come for Corsica to receive an 'original' statute with 'autonomous powers within the Republic' based on 'efficiency and democracy'.[72] Some controversial issues were not addressed in this first round of negotiations in order to increase the viability of the proposals. This was the case of the expression 'Corsican people', which the constitutional court had rejected in the Joxe Statute and was postponed to a further round of negotiations following the presidential elections of 2002.

For Corsican nationalists, the recognition of the existence of a *peuple corse*, even as a part of the *peuple français* as in the 1991 statute proposal, was a key aspect that could justify a special status not based upon functional, but symbolic – albeit not 'national' – reasons. In contrast with the top-down, unilateral, non-negotiated and mainly administrative approach followed in the previous statutes of 1982 and 1991, the Matignon process was a unique opportunity to confront the French national project with the demands for Corsican nationalism and explore possible arrangements for the accommodation of Corsica within the French state.[73]

Corsican nationalism became more willing to accept some kind of asymmetric arrangement within the Republic that would provide the island with the necessary powers to preserve and promote its identity and to manage its own affairs. The nationalist discourse introduced modernising elements to adapt its discourse to an institutional horizon that the French institutions could accept. First, despite the constant tensions and the impossibility of building a unified movement, there was an implicit agreement to accept an institutional horizon which involved autonomy rather than independence. Secondly, the reference to self-determination represents a shift towards a more flexible position, introducing a civic dimension to the traditionally ethnic-based Corsican identity, and emphasising the distinction between citizenship and nationality in which an asymmetric arrangement for Corsica within France was perceived as a likely horizon. Third, this arrangement could take the institutional form already applied in the overseas territories and could be accommodated within the French constitutional system. Fourth, the political recognition of Corsica is rooted in her geographical context, mainly the Mediterranean, where most islands enjoy some sort of special status, if they are not fully independent states. Other important factors are the existence of the European Union and the idea of a Europe of the Regions, within which Corsica could have a significant voice.

72   Pellegrenetti and Rovere 2004: 636.
73   The transcription of the Committee's debates is available at Assemblée Nationale (2001), *Rapport fait au nom de la Commission des Lois Constitutionnelles, de la Législation et de l'Administration Générale de la République sur le projet de loi (N° 2931), relatif à la Corse*, by Bruno Le Roux. París, document no. 2995 <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/11/rapports/r2995.asp> accessed 25 November 2009.

The republican discourse seemed to revive the classical distinction between Jacobins and Girondins, but both aimed to situate the island firmly within the state. Ultimately, the controversy between the two positions hinged on the extent to which asymmetric reform would threaten the unity of the Republic as a uni-national state. This division was more an intra-party cleavage than a right–left issue, as exemplified by the opposition of Jean-Pierre Chevènement, the minister of the interior responsible for implementing the reforms. Chevènement's opposition showed how the accommodation of Corsica within France is not just an administrative matter, but rather a challenge to the French national identity project, which is based on the idea of a 'community of citizens'.[74] Any institutional reform that goes beyond the administrative dimension, whether it is the recognition of the 'Corsican people', or the possibility of legislative powers for the Corsican assembly, is seen as something that will weaken the Republic externally and internally. Externally, as the horizon of a Europe of the Regions presents an opportunity for Corsican nationalism, it becomes a threat for French Jacobinism. Internally, because a Corsica with legislative powers or a status similar to that enjoyed by the overseas territories would be a failure for France and a victory for the secessionist movements.[75] Even though the project aimed explicitly 'to end violence and ensure peace, to strengthen Corsica's links with the Republic, and to clarify responsibilities regarding the management of the island's affairs', for Chevènement these reforms would bring 'dreadful consequences', deepening 'the crisis of France as a political nation, as a community of citizens, and doomed by post-national prophets to be dissolved into the Europe of the Regions'.[76] Chevènement eventually resigned and the new minister, Daniel Vaillant, acknowledged Corsican specificity not only in geographical, but also in cultural and historical terms. The new minister declared that the reforms could not be developed 'as though Corsica were not a particular region through her history and through her culture. As though she were not an island'.[77] Although this is a clear example of a pluralist conception of the state and Corsica, it should be noted that this vision of territorial diversity in France fails to challenge the traditional concepts of the nation or citizenship. Rather, it is designed to strengthen the Republican project based on reasons of functional modernisation and local democracy rather than the recognition of substate identities.

The failure of Matignon could be interpreted as a defeat for the pluralist approach, but it could also be argued that apart from having a different rhetoric it has several points in common with the sovereigntist perspective. First, there is only one nation, France, and the French project of national identity appeals to Corsica as a non-distinctive part of the nation. Secondly, any potential territorial reform of the state must be limited to the recognition of the regions in geographical

terms and not in terms of the existence of substate identities. Regional diversity is a national heritage, but not a reason for claiming a special status. Any step beyond an administrative dimension is perceived as a threat to the unity of the Republic. The process questioned to what extent the republican project could adapt its discourse to accommodate territorial demands of recognition. However, in the political discourse of the French government and political parties, there is little more than generic references to Corsican specificity or to French diversity. These references are made from a functional perspective, in order to improve the administration, enhance local democracy, and strengthen the Republic, but they do not affect the unitary conception of the state and the nation, the so-called 'community of citizens'. Mainstream positions at state level regard any institutional reform that provides the Corsican assembly with political powers – whether these are legislative capacity, symbolic recognition, or the teaching of the Corsican language in school – as a threat to the unity of the Republic. The Matignon process represented an innovation in the way the Republic had hitherto dealt with territorial demands for recognition, but it failed to produce a new model, let alone the political enhancement of Corsica as a space for political decision. It did, however, deepen the functional regionalisation of the state.

Political change in 2002 brought a new direction to regional policy, though it could be argued that this remained closely linked to the main elements of the regionalisation process established in 1982. According to the re-elected president of the Republic, Jacques Chirac, a region could not receive particular legislative powers if the model in question was not intended to be extended to all of them, and in any case it would require a reform of the Constitution for the state to maintain control over the system.[78] The new Minister of the Interior Nicolas Sarkozy immediately visited Ajaccio. Refocusing the regional question on administrative issues, he regarded possible reforms in Corsica as a pilot programme which could later be extended to all the regions. In his view, Corsican specificity relied on the fact that 'they [the Corsicans] will be at the forefront of this [new step toward] decentralisation'.[79] Moreover, regionalisation had to be adapted to the position expressed by the *Conséil Constitutionnel*, which in January 2002 had rejected the possibility of legislative powers for Corsica, even in the form of 'expérimentation'. Once again, the constitutional and political systems excluded the possibility of an asymmetric arrangement for Corsica.

The new reform was to be conducted by means of a constitutional amendment, and it included the possibility of holding regional referendums to pass new statutes or reform existing ones. The French government argued that reform would be a new step towards subsidiarity in the modernisation and rationalisation of the administration. However, the political dimension of the process had two effects. On the one hand, it came up against the same opposition from the sectors that were most unfavourable towards the regionalisation process – from those who continued

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74 As defined by Dominique Schnapper in *Community of Citizens* (1998), New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

75 Chevènement and Colonna d'Istria 2001: 11.

76 Ibid.: 13.

77 *Journal Officiel* 16–23 May 2002, quoted in Pellegrenetti and Rovere, 2004: 639.

78 Pellegrenetti and Rovere 2004: 61.

79 Ibid.: 642.

to perceive any regionalisation proposal as the first step towards the independence of Corsica, to those who regarded it as an attempt to transform France into a federal state which would be diluted in the Europe of the Regions. On the other hand, Corsican nationalism had ambiguous feelings about the referendum. The proposal fell short of fulfilling their demands for autonomy, but was seen as the highest level of decentralisation that the central government would offer.[80] The failure of the 2003 referendum reinforced this argument and represented a victory for the more traditional conception of the state. In the 2007 presidential campaign, the leading candidates, Nicolas Sarkozy and Ségolene Royal, kept decentralisation on their political agendas, stressing the improvement of the administration and local democracy as the main arguments in favour of the reform, in the wider context of the modernisation of the Republic's institutions that was implemented in 2008.[81] Sarkozy regarded the Corsican question as a matter of administrative organisation and, as such, an issue involving the whole state. Royal's position might appear to have been more flexible towards Corsica, but beyond some gestures her position shared the classical features of republicanism. In a visit to Corsica in 2006, for example, she stated that 'l'ordre républican doit s'appliquer partout' – the island must receive the same treatment as any other part of France – adding that 'tout changement aux institutions de la Corse serait déraisonnable'.[82]

Conclusion: The End of the Corsican Question?

As we have seen, arguments for decentralisation in the French case stress geographical or functional rather than cultural or linguistic reasons. Insularity in the case of Corsica, the special needs of built-up urban areas, or the distance between the overseas territories and continental France define the subjects of the regionalisation process in terms of administrative modernisation, efficiency, or subsidiarity, but not with regard to claims for self-government based on cultural or national specificities. This is the rationale that underpins the most recent constitutional reforms, regardless of whether they involve the conception of France as a 'decentralised Republic', the possibility of legislative powers for regional assemblies under the control of the central government, or the consideration of regional languages as a part of the Republic's heritage. It should be noted that if they are compared with the Matignon proposals, the new wave of constitutional reforms address most of the issues on the agenda. But while the Matignon process introduced an element of bilateralism and provided a relatively wide framework

for discussion, the recent constitutional reforms are closer to the classical top-down, centrally steered and predominantly administrative model of French decentralisation. The possibility that Corsica will enjoy a special status within France is currently out of reach and, moreover, the present institutional framework makes it possible to consolidate a homogeneous regional model for metropolitan France, leaving it in the hands of the central government to introduce some specific arrangements when special needs are taken into consideration. But it excludes the possibility of specific rights based on substate territorial identities.

A pertinent question is to what extent this new phase may lead to the 'end' of the Corsican question, as it seems that the French state does not consider the possibility of exploring asymmetric arrangements in continental France. Recent debates on the nature of the French national project have emphasised the challenges derived from globalisation and multiculturalism rather than those involving territorial diversity within the state, and the institutional reforms of recent years have resulted in the regeneration of the political system rather than the recognition of substate identities.[83] If the Corsican question remains off the state's political agenda and based on administrative issues rather than on political recognition, it may give rise to a new wave of violence, but it will also challenge the capacity of Corsican nationalism to overcome their cyclical disputes and consolidate the historical results obtained in the regional elections of 2010.[84]

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80   Ibid.: 645.

81   Loi constitutionnelle no. 2008-724 du 23 juillet 2008 de modernisation des institutions de la Ve République <http://legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORF TEXT000019237256> accessed 20 November 2009.

82   <http://lci.tf1.fr/france/2006-07/quand-segolene-royal-flatte-corse-4856077. html> accessed 20 November 2009.

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83   An illustrative example is the new Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Solidarity Development that has fostered the debate on national identity, while the regional policy remains under the Ministry of the Interior.

84   Daftary 2008: 304.